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Poe in South Carolina

and appeared in his second volume in 1829. There are later echoes:

Around by lifting winds forgot,
Resignedly beneath the sky,
The melancholy waters lie.

H. A.

REVIEWS

A SONNETEER

Poems, by Stewart Mitchell. Duffield and Co.

The sonnet in our time occupies a lonely and illusory pinnacle. Due to the obsolescence of other imposed verse-patterns, it is mistakenly considered a special province of poetic art, which it is not. It may be an important form only by virtue of its history: it is perhaps the only purely romantic system which has become entirely acclimated; in periods of great fecundity in our literature it has had the cry of fashion; it has attracted profound and celebrated writers. Sequences of sonnets have been substituted for that anomaly of our art, the long lyric, as in Christina Rossetti's *Later Life* and Donne's *Holy Sonnets*, probably the best we have. It is fortunately based on a ten-syllable line peculiarly pleasant in the English tongue. Within it one can experiment, as the Elizabethans did, in complex passions and subtle argument properly dramatic. It may be made the journal of an introspective or passionate life, as in Mr. Blunt's *Proteus* and *Esther* sequences. But

POETRY: *A Magazine of Verse*

its possible rhymes are easily exhaustible in our language, and thereafter reminiscent. Unlike its musical namesake, the sonata, there is no esoteric logic or balance to govern it. Other forms, such as the sestina, may set a pace for more varied music. I suspect its present dismal distinction is due in part to the mere fact of its obsolescence. Modern sonnets are many, and usually mediocre. Each new bundle arouses one's hope: "Here, after all, at last, may be the real thing."

One's hope is not altogether dashed by Stewart Mitchell's book, which contains about two dozen, although he does not invent a new music, or trouble the old unsubtle cadence. The effect, never achieved by this poet, of a truly great sonnet like Donne's *Death Be Not Proud* is produced by the clash of a surging internal movement upon or against the rigid scheme. Among contemporaries Miss Millay will best bear comparison with her masters in this respect. Sonneteers like Mitchell write too much "in the pattern," with a resultant tonal emptiness, or invirility.

His art rather reeks of the intellect. Vision and passion are strained through nets of speculation and sieves of analysis. Nothing actually escapes, or would seem quite to satisfy him. That any trace of ecstasy is hard to identify may be because he makes the mistake of codification inaccurately associated with the *fin de siècle*—with Ernest Dowson, the original work of that subtle translator Arthur Symonds, et al. When human affairs

are generalized into "parched desire," "redolent splendor," "pitiless fates," etc., the odd commonplace holds true that identity, force and conviction go out of them. Modes of thought and address, "preserved" as fruit is preserved, tend to limit the precision of verse as a means of communication. "The conditions of life pre-determined slavery to be easy and freedom hard," says Marianne Moore. One wearies, to the point of fury, of this brand of expressivism:

Bring me, this evening, crimson wine
Such as in twilight seems to keep
Secrets of death in serpentine
Sinuous sleep.

At its best, however, this book is not an arid field for those who prefer the rewards of a discreet cultivated mind to the glare and quaver of more fickle if stronger imaginations.

Glenway Wescott

A FRENCH VICTORIAN

Plays of Edmond Rostand, translated by Henderson Daingerfield Norman. Illustrated by Ivan Glidden. Macmillan Co.

In spite of certain confusions of idiom, this is a rather spirited translation of the most popular French playwright of his day. It rhymes almost as lightly and easily as the original, and has a similar slam-bang movement, and the same flavor and color of swashbuckling, noisy